

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

**Listing of Claims:**

Claims 1-23 (canceled)

Claim 24 (new): A method of producing a protein of interest, comprising:  
providing a bacterial strain of the *Lactococcus* genus, wherein the *htrA* gene has been mutated so that said strain does not express a functional HtrA protease;  
introducing into said bacterial strain a nucleic acid having a sequence encoding a protein of interest operably linked to a promoter; and  
culturing the bacterial strain under conditions causing expression of the protein from the nucleic acid;  
recovering said protein exported by said strain in the culture medium.

Claim 25 (new): A method according to claim 24, wherein the bacterial strain is a *Lactococcus lactis* strain.

Claim 26 (new): A method according to claim 24, wherein the bacterial strain also does not express a functional PrtP protease.

Claim 27 (new): A bacterial strain of the *Lactococcus* genus, wherein the *htrA* gene has been mutated so that said strain does not express a functional HtrA protease, and wherein said strain comprises an expression cassette having a sequence encoding a protein of interest operably linked to a promoter.

Claim 28 (new): A bacterial strain according to claim 27, wherein the strain also does not express a functional PrtP protease.

Claim 29 (new): A method of producing a fermented product, comprising:  
culturing a bacterial strain according to claim 27 with a fermentation substrate under conditions suitable to produce a fermented product.

Claim 30 (new): A method of producing a dietetic food, comprising:  
culturing a bacterial strain according to claim 27 with a substrate under conditions suitable to produce a dietetic food.

Claim 31 (new): A method of producing a medicinal product, comprising:  
culturing a bacterial strain according to claim 27 HtrA with a suitable substrate under conditions effective to produce a medicinal product.

Claim 32 (new): A method according to claim 31, wherein the medicinal product is a vaccine.